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THE WORLD OF THE *GOLDEN ASS* *

By FERGUS MILLAR

Those who study and teach the history of the Ancient World suffer from a great disadvantage, which we find difficult to admit even to ourselves: in a perfectly literal sense we do not know what we are talking about. Of course we can dispose of a vast range of accumulated knowledge *about* what we are talking about. We can compile lists of office-holders in the Roman Empire, without our evidence revealing how government worked or even whether it made any impact at all on the ordinary person; we can discuss the statuses of cities and look at the archaeological remains of some of them (or rather some parts of some of them) without having any notion of their social and economic functions, or of whether it made any real difference whether an inhabitant of the Roman provinces lived in a small city or a large village. We can study the remains of temples, the iconography of gods and goddesses, the nature of myth, ritual and sacrifice; but how and in what way did all this provide an important or intelligible context for a peasant in the fields? In the case of religion in particular our attention turns persistently to the exceptional rather than the ordinary, to those aspects which were novel, imported, mystical or the subject of philosophical speculation. Let me take a precise example from the *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass*, Apuleius' brilliant novel of the second century A.D. The exotic aspects of ancient religion which the novel reveals have always attracted attention; the hero's vision of Isis, and his conversion to the worship of Isis and Osiris;[1] the band of Syrian priests making their fraudulent way through the Greek countryside;[2] the wicked baker's wife who has abandoned the gods and worships what she says is a single god—in other words, is a Christian.[3] But if we really want to understand how the divine order related to ordinary life in antiquity we should start from an incident a few chapters later (IX, 33–4). Strange portents occur in a farm house: a hen lays a live chicken, blood rises from the floor and wine standing in jars in the wine-store begins to boil. The farmer and his friends are reduced to bewilderment: what steps should they take . . . with how many sacrifices of what sort are they to appease the threats of the heavenly powers? They are *afraid*, just as the pagan world was afraid when too many people began to follow the example of the baker's wife, and abandoned sacrifice to the gods.

This story, as Apuleius tells it, has another important characteristic. Rather as in *Wuthering Heights*, the remarkable and fantastic goings-on in Apuleius' novel take place in a solidly realistic background, in this case a farm-house with chickens in the yard, wine-jars in store, sheepdogs and sheep. Indeed I am going to suggest that the realism of tone in the novel may extend beyond purely physical descriptions, to realistic images of social and economic relations, the framework of communal life in a Roman province and even, here and there, to the wider context of what it meant to be a subject of the Roman Empire.

I must make clear first how paradoxical this claim is. What we are concerned with is a novel of some 250 pages written in Latin in the second century A.D. by Apuleius, who came from the province of Africa. It is set, however, not in Africa but in central and northern Greece, in the Roman provinces of Achaea and Macedonia.[4] The basic narrative is not original to Apuleius, for it already existed in the form of a longish short story in Greek, of which one version survives.[5] A brief summary of this story will also give the main narra-

* This paper represents the almost unaltered text of an Inaugural Lecture given at University College London on March 2, 1981. I am very grateful to Michael Crawford and Nicholas Horsfall for information and discussions on various points.

[1] *Met.* XI. See esp. J. Gwyn Griffith, *Apuleius of Madauros: The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)* (1975).

[2] *Met.* VIII, 24–IX, 10. See F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*[4] (1929), ch. 5.

[3] *Met.* IX, 14. See esp. T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian* (1971), App. 21; M. Simon, 'Apulée et le Christianisme', *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech* (1974), 299.

[4] It is quite probable, as argued by G. W. Bowersock, 'Zur Geschichte des römischen Thessaliens', *Rh. Mus.* CVIII (1965), 277, that Thessaly was transferred from Achaea to Macedonia at the moment of Nero's grant of freedom in 67. As he points out (p. 285 f.), *ILS* 1067 does not imply that Thessaly is within the same province as Athens, Thespiae, and Plataea. But it is in any case clear from Ptolemy, *Geog.* III, 12, 13–14 and 42 (Müller), that in Pius' reign Thessaly was part of Macedonia; cf. L. Robert, *Hellenica* V, 29–30.

[5] I refer to *Lucius or the Ass* preserved in the works of Lucian (most readily available in the Loeb Lucian, vol. VIII, 47 f.), and venture no further on the question of the authorship of this or its relation to the *Metamorphoses* of (?) Lucius of Patras, briefly summarized by Photius, *Bibl.*, cod. 129. For all these questions see H. Van Thiel, *Der Eselsroman* I–II (1971–2).

tive thread of the *Golden Ass*, which uses all the main incidents. A young man of good family from Patras named Lucius tells the story in the first person. He had been travelling on business in Thessaly, a region whose women had a reputation for magical practices.[6] In Hypata he had an affair with a slave girl, who allowed him to observe her mistress using magic arts to turn herself into an owl. Lucius asked for the same potion, got the wrong one and was turned into an ass instead (keeping his human intellect and power of observation). When robbers raided the house they took him away with them; after various adventures he was rescued, put to work in a mill, sold at Beroea in Macedonia to some Syrian priests, then in turn to a baker and a market gardener, was requisitioned by a soldier and finally bought by a rich man from Thessalonica. There a lady fell in love with him, and insisted on his making love to her. The master found out and decided to include a scene of the ass making love to a condemned female prisoner in a public show which he was about to put on. Just in time before this public degradation, the ass had been able to apply the formula for release—eating some roses—and was changed back into human form. At this point the story, which is curiously dull in Greek, reaches a rather fine black-comedy ending. For Lucius, in human form, rushes back to the lady, only to find that she thinks him no longer adequately equipped, and has him ignominiously thrown out. He sets off home, grateful to have escaped from the consequences of his asinine curiosity.

There is no possible doubt that Apuleius based his novel on a version of this story; indeed he explicitly tells the reader that it derived from a Greek original.[7] However he has transformed it in various ways. Firstly, he makes the hero, again called Lucius, come from Corinth, and has the story end there rather than in Thessalonica. Secondly, he replaces the black-comedy ending by the famous and brilliantly-described scene of the release of Lucius by the goddess Isis, and his subsequent conversion. Thirdly, curiosity (*curiositas*), and its improper application to supernatural things, now becomes a serious theme running through the novel;[8] at the end the priest of Isis says to Lucius ' because you sank to servile pleasures, you have earned the ill reward of your unfortunate *curiositas* ' (XI, 15). Fourthly, in the Isis scene, and the subsequent conversion, Apuleius *may*—as is generally assumed—be importing into the novel a profound personal experience; and he may even at the end intend to blur the distinction between himself as author, from the African city of Madauros, and Lucius the hero and narrator; for Lucius, who comes from Corinth, has been to Rome to study rhetoric in Latin and finishes up (rather tamely) at the end of the novel as a successful advocate in Rome.[9] Apuleius himself, born in the 120s, had studied in Carthage, then went to Athens to pursue the study of Greek literature and philosophy and at some stage also practised as an advocate in Rome. In a speech before the proconsul of Africa in 162–3, Apuleius boasted that he had written a whole variety of literary works in prose and verse, in both Greek and Latin.[10] In other words the author of the novel and its fictional narrator have crossed the boundary between the Greek- and Latin-speaking worlds in very similar ways but in opposite directions.

So in the novel Apuleius is portraying a young man from a provincial upper class society closely parallel to his own. He also of course knew Athens, and very likely Corinth.[11]

[6] For other allusions see Bowersock, op. cit. (n. 4), 278.

[7] *Met.* I, 1. See esp. A. Mazzarino, *La milesia e Apuleio* (1950); H. J. Mason, ' Fabula Graecanica; Apuleius and his Greek Sources ', in B. L. Hijmans and R. Th. van der Paardt, *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (1978), 1. Cf. J. Tatum, *Apuleius and the Golden Ass* (1979).

[8] See esp. S. Lancel, ' ' Curiositas ' et préoccupations spirituelles chez Apulée ', *Rev. hist. relig.* CLX (1961), 25; J. Tatum, *op. cit.* (n. 7), 22 f.; 76 f., and esp. A. Wlosok, ' Zur Einheit der Metamorphosen des Apuleius ', *Philol.* CXIII (1969), 68.

[9] For the ' conversion ' see n. 1 and e.g. A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (1933), ch. 9. For speculations on the autobiographical element see e.g. J. Hicter, ' Autobiographie dans l'Âne d'or d'Apulée ', *Ant. Class.* XIII (1944), 95; XIV (1945), 61. But note the salutary scepticism of J.-C. Fredouille, *Apulée, Metamorphoses Livre XI* (1975), who also argues (pp. 15–17) that the sense in XI, 27, 9, ' Madaurensem, sed admodum pauperem ', requires ' *Corinthi*ensem '. On that view the deliberate personal allusion would disappear.

[10] *Flor.* 9, 27–9. There is no need to rehearse here the biographical evidence about him, which is collected in Schanz-Hosius-Krüger, *Römische Literaturgeschichte* III[3] (1922), 100 f.

[11] For his possible knowledge of Corinth and Cenchreae see e.g. P. Veyne, ' Apulée à Cenchrées ', *Rev. Phil.* XXXIX (1965), 241; H. J. Mason, ' Lucius at Corinth ', *Phoenix* XXV (1971), 160. For Cenchreae see now R. Scranton, J. W. Shaw and L. Ibrahim, *Kenchreai: Eastern Port of Corinth* I: *Topography and Architecture* (1978), esp. 71 on the possible site of the shrine of Isis (Paus. II, 2, 3). For a collection of evidence on Corinth, J. Wiseman, ' Corinth and Rome I: 228 B.C.–A.D. 267 ', *ANRW* VII.1 (1979), 438.

But when he describes in the novel the world of the small towns of central and northern Greece, I cannot say whether he is using personal knowledge or imposing his conceptions of what was typical. In any case we must remember the distance between the author and his theme: he is describing in Latin a society which spoke Greek; but, far more important, in narrating the adventures of the ass he is making a fictional journey which descends through all levels of contemporary society. It is therefore a highly self-conscious literary process which has given us some of the very rare representations of lower class life in the literature of the High Empire. The framework of the existing story is used quite deliberately for social observation: precisely at the point where Lucius as the ass finds himself at the lowest context which he reaches on the economic and social scale—among the wretched slaves working in a mill—he reflects on the opportunities for observation which fortune has granted to him (IX, 13):

> Nor was there any comfort for the torments of my existence except that I was sustained by my innate curiosity, in that ignoring my presence they all acted and spoke freely as they wished. Quite rightly the divine author of ancient poetry among the Greeks, wishing to portray a man of the highest wisdom, sang of how he had reached the highest qualities by travelling around many cities and gaining the acquaintance of varied peoples; so I myself give grateful thanks to my ass's shape, in that concealed behind it and tested by various fortunes I was rendered if not very wise, at least more experienced.

It is thus that Apuleius, looking through the eyes of Lucius transformed into an ass, can give his unique description of the slaves toiling in the mill, dressed in a few rags, their half-naked bodies scarred with the marks of beatings, their foreheads branded, their heads half-shaved, their feet in fetters, all of them covered in a fine dust of flour (IX, 12). It is undeniable that the novel expresses a rare and distinctive level of sympathy with the working lives of the poor.[12] But that is all; I am not suggesting that Apuleius was a proto-Engels, writing his *Condition of the Working Class in Greece*. If there is a parallel to any work of nineteenth-century literature it is of course to Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, which by a similar device offers a rather underestimated portrait of the different levels of Victorian society, from the point of view of bourgeois sentimentality.

The *Golden Ass* has rightly been called an anti-epic,[13] in which the hero or anti-hero endures a variety of misfortunes before a final liberation from trials. But beyond that there are three original and significant features of its literary character, which are essential to its uses for the historian. Firstly, it is set firmly and unmistakably in the immediate present. The original Greek short story is indeed also set in the Roman Empire. But Apuleius makes Lucius the relative of two real historical persons, Plutarch, who had died in the 120s, and his nephew, the philosopher Sextus of Chaeronea, whom Marcus Aurelius still went to hear when he was Emperor after 161.[14] Secondly, and more important, Apuleius fills out the story with a whole series of separate tales or narratives related by characters in it. One of these, the romance of Amor and Psyche, which is narrated to comfort a young lady captured by the robbers, is quite distinct from the others, for it is set in an imaginary time and place and occupies some fifty pages; since it has no obvious literary or thematic connection with the rest of the work, endless displays of ingenuity and erudition have gone into demonstrating that this non-apparent connection really is there.[15] But all the other, much shorter stories which Apuleius has added are set in the same time, place and social context as the main narrative; all offer at least parallels to, or foreshadowings of, episodes in the main

[12] See the interesting if not entirely convincing essay by N. Fick, 'Les Metamorphoses d'Apulée et le monde du travail', in J. M. André et al., *Recherches sur les Artes à Rome* (1978), 86.

[13] See G. Cooper, 'Sexual and Ethical Reversal in Apuleius: the *Metamorphoses* as Anti-Epic', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* II (1980), 436.

[14] *Met.* I, 2; II, 2–3. For Plutarch and his family see C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (1971), ch. 1. For Marcus still hearing Sextus of Chaeronea while Emperor, Philostratus, *Vit. Soph.* II, 1; Dio LXXI, 1, 2. For terminology in the novel implying a setting in the mid-second century see also n. 19 below.

[15] See e.g. P. Grimal, *Apulée, Metamorphoseis* (IV, 28– VI, 24) (*le conte d'Amour et Psyche* (1963); G. Binder, R. Merkelbach (eds.), *Amor und Psyche* (*Wege der Forschung*, 1968); F. E. Hoevels, *Märchen und Magie in den Metamorphosen des Apuleius von Madaura* (1979), 1: 'Die zentrale Frage der Apuleiusforschung war und ist bis heute die nach Sinn der Amor- und Psyche-Einlage im Eselsroman (4, 28– 6, 24)'.

story; and the majority are necessary for explaining its development.[16] It is the combined total of the main story and these narrated episodes, some 200 pages of text, which I have called the world of the *Golden Ass*.

But, thirdly, the reason why it is worth exploring this world is the one which I hinted at earlier: that Apuleius clothes his sequence of fantastic episodes in a mass of vivid, concrete and realistic detail, on physical objects, houses, social structure, economic relations, the political framework of the local communities, and the wider political framework of the Empire. Let me start with an example relating to the Emperor. Apuleius borrows from the Greek short story the episode in which the ass, being driven towards their mountain hideout by the robbers, decides to appeal for the Emperor's protection (III, 29). Speaking in Greek of course, he starts off on the words ' O Caesar ', can manage a loud bray of ' O '—but is not equipped to pronounce the rest. Apuleius makes him choose a moment when the robbers are passing by a large village (*vicus*), which is especially full of people because a fair is being held there. Both the short story and the novel offer a very significant image or model of how the Emperor was conceived of as an ever-present protector. Apuleius adds a revealing presumption about the structure and functioning of social and economic life in the countryside.[17] So, I suggest, we can use the representations in Apuleius in at least three ways: as portrayals of areas of social life which ancient literature usually passes over; as adding colour to patterns which we know already from other, more formal evidence; and—most important—as offering *alternative* models of society to those which we normally accept.

If we combine the main narrative and the stories attached to it into a ' world of the *Golden Ass* ', we can see that this world of small Greek towns and villages is not at all isolated from a wider context. Lucius himself has been to Rome, and returns there at the end; a Chaldaean soothsayer plies his trade in Corinth (II, 12–14); a young man has come from Miletus to see the Olympic games (II, 21); an Egyptian prophet displays his magical skills in Larissa (II, 28); a group of Syrian priests journeys from village to village (VIII, 24–IX, 10). Travel between different regions of the Empire is simply presumed as an aspect of the wider context.

That presumption affects the wider political framework too. The ass is briefly owned by a soldier, who sells him when ordered to go off to Rome with a letter for the Emperor (X, 13); letters carried by messenger between governors and Emperor were in fact the essential mechanism which allowed a centralized, if passive, government to be carried on. The Emperor is invoked in oaths and prayers (IX, 41; XI, 17—along with the Senate, Equites and Populus Romanus), and there is no mistaking the consciousness of the characters that they live in a world with a single ruler,[18] whose name might in principle be used to gain protection. But a real and active intervention by the Emperor will only come about in very special circumstances. This is perfectly shown in the false story told to the robbers by a rich young man who arrives at their hideout in disguise to rescue his fiancée. He has to persuade them both that he himself is a famous robber who would add strength to their band, and that he has had a convincing piece of bad luck, leading to the destruction of his own band. So he says that he is the renowned robber Haemus whose band had ravaged Macedonia. But by ill-luck a high-ranking *procurator* of the Emperor (a *ducenarius*) [19] had

[16] The narrated ' real-life ' episodes are (1) I, 5–19, Aristomenes' story, told by himself and set in Hypata; (2) II, 13–14, the story of Diophanes the Chaldaean at Corinth, told by Lucius' host Milo; (3) II, 21–30, Thelyphron's story, told by himself and set in Larissa; (4) IV, 9–21, the story of the robber Lamachus and others, told by one of his companions and set in Boeotia; (5) VII, 5–8, the exploits of the pretended robber Haemus, told by himself (in reality Tlepolemus) and set in Macedonia and Epirus; (6) VIII, 1–14, the story of Charite and Tlepolemus, told by one of her slaves; exact setting unclear, but in the same region as the rest; (7) IX, 5–7, the *faber* and his wife; narrator not indicated; (8) IX, 17–21, the decurion Barbarus and his wife's lover, told by an old woman to the baker's wife; (9) IX, 35–8, the fate of the three sons of the *hortulanus*' rich patron, narrator not identified; (10) X, 2–12, the story of the wicked *noverca*, overheard from conversations by the ass, and set somewhere in Thessaly; (11) X, 23–8, the story of the condemned Corinthian woman; no specific narrator.

[17] For comparative material see the important article by R. MacMullen, ' Market-Days in the Roman Empire ', *Phoenix* XXIV (1970), 333.

[18] For the theme of the function of the Imperial cult in inducing consciousness of belonging to a single political framework see K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (1978), ch. 5: ' Divine Emperors or the Symbolic Unity of the Roman Empire '.

[19] *Met.* VII, 6: ' procuratorem principis ducenaria perfunctum '. This is only the second recorded usage of the term, the earliest being Suetonius, *Claudius* 24. Documentary uses begin in the reign

lost favour at court and been exiled to the island of Zacynthus—and it was when he, his faithful wife and their escort of soldiers were staying en route at an inn at Actium that the robbers had happened to attack it, and were driven off. They had withdrawn unscathed. But the *procurator*'s wife had afterwards gone back to the Emperor and successfully petitioned him both for the release of her husband and for the despatch of detachments (*vexillationes*) of legions to destroy the band of robbers.

As it happens, we have an inscription from just this period which records that in about 176 detachments (*vexillationes*) of legions from Moesia were sent south to the territory bordering on Macedonia and Thrace to ' dislodge ' a band of Thracian brigands.[20] But far more important is the implication that, in unimportant areas like Macedonia and Epirus, only an accident could have stirred the imperial will to action to restore public order; and, more important still, that the mechanism for bringing this about would have been the petition or literally ' prayer ' (*preces*) of an influential person, answered by the assent, or literally ' nod ' (*nutus*) of the Emperor. Precisely this model of the operations of government was the central theme of *The Emperor in the Roman World.*

If it was only in special circumstances that the Emperor would make his distant presence felt, what of the governor of the province—or rather the two governors of the two provinces, for when Apuleius was writing, probably around 170, Thessaly was part of Macedonia, whose proconsul had his base in Thessalonica.[21] Both he and the proconsul of Achaea, with his seat at Corinth, will have had a few auxiliary units of soldiers.[22] But in the world described by Apuleius neither they nor any other forces perform regular police functions in town or country.[23] Indeed, when the slave-girl describes to Lucius the serious dangers of going out at night in Hypata, she says explicitly ' nor can the *auxilia* of the governor, far away as they are, rid the city of such carnage '.[24] In the scenes set in Thessaly the Roman proconsul never appears in person. But he is mentioned at least in the scene where the ass's current master, a gardener, is riding home from market; a soldier appears, questions him in Latin, and on getting no answer beats him with his stick.[25] Then he starts again in Greek, saying that the ass must be requisitioned for transporting the baggage of the governor (*praeses*) from the next village (IX, 39). The gardener had evidently not read the *Discourses* of Epictetus, published a few decades earlier; for there the advice is given that in exactly this situation one should give up one's ass promptly when a soldier demands it, and avoid a beating.[26] At any rate he knocks down the soldier and makes off. This soldier apparently belongs to a unit which is escorting the governor,[27] and the scene provides a small fictional

of Marcus Aurelius with *AE* 1962, 183: ' ad ducenariae procurationis splendorem '. See *JRS* LIII (1963), 197, and H.-G. Pflaum in *Bonn. Jahrb.* CLXXI (1971), 349. For the deployment of a fairly new technical term note also ' fisci advocatus ' (VII, 10), used ironically of one of the robbers; it had come into use in Hadrian's reign, see HA, *v.Had.* 20,6; for the earliest attested case, W. Eck, *RE* Supp. XV, col. 123, ' Iulius ' (228a).

[20] *AE* 1956, 124, see Pflaum, *Carrières*, no. 181 *bis* (M. Valerius Maximianus): ' praeposito vexillationibus et at (*sic*) detrahendum Briseorum latronum manum in confinio Macedon(iae) et Thrac(iae) ab Imperatore misso '. On the Brisci see Pflaum, op. cit., I, p. 489.

[21] For the division see n. 4 above. The proconsul of Macedonia appears in the last section of *Lucius or the Ass* (54–5).

[22] See E. Ritterling, ' Military Forces in the Senatorial Provinces ', *JRS* XVII (1927), 28; R. K. Sherk, ' Roman Imperial Troops in Macedonia and Achaea ', *AJPh* LXXVIII (1957), 52 (not considering the evidence from Apuleius).

[23] In this the novel contrasts clearly with the martyr-acts, where Roman soldiers perform an active police role; see G. Lopuszanski, ' La police romaine et les Chrétiens ', *Ant. Class.* XX (1951), 5.

[24] *Met.* II, 18: ' nec praesidis auxilia longinqua levare civitatem tanta clade possunt '.

[25] The soldier is described simply as a *miles*, but has a *vitis* with a thickened end (IX, 40: ' inversa vite de vastiore nodulo cerebrum suum diffindere '), normally thought of as the mark of a centurion, see e.g. G. Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army*[2] (1979), 132. Exactly the same contradiction confronts us in the grave-relief of a *miles* from Corinth, see M. Šašel Kos, *JRS* LVIII (1978), 22, who also notes (p. 23) that there are a number of such depictions of soldiers with a *vitis* from Achaea and Macedonia, and suggests (p. 24) some connection with service in the *provinciae inermes*.

[26] Epictetus, *Diss.* IV, 1, 79, quoted by M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*[2] (1957), ch. 8, n. 37 (also referring to the story of the *hortulanus*, the only episode from Apuleius used by Rostovtzeff.)

[27] It is puzzling that the soldier should be described as a ' miles e legione ' (IX, 39). Apuleius might in this case have been misled by the system in Africa, where the legion III Augusta provided the *beneficiarii* for the proconsul (Tacitus, *Hist.* IV, 48). On the other hand the soldier's superior officer is described (X, 13) as a *tribunus* (compare the *tribunus cohortis* with Caecilius Classicus as proconsul of Baetica, Pliny, *Ep.* III, 9, 18). *Tribuni* of auxiliary units must have been in command of *cohortes milliariae*, and what seems to be the same superior officer appears in X, 1 as ' praepositum suum, qui mille armatorum ducatum sustinebat '. For comparable usages see R. E. Smith, ' Dux, Praepositus ', *ZPE* XXXVI (1979), 263.

example of much the most important area of contact and conflict between state and subject in the Roman Empire; that is, the provision of animals, waggons, supplies and accommodation for passing messengers and officials, or troops on the move. The tensions thus created are reflected in long series of complaints on the one side and of pronouncements by governors and Emperors on the other.[28] It is surely significant that in our documentary evidence from outside Egypt far more attention is given to this issue than to that of direct taxation in cash or kind.

In Apuleius' story the gardener is eventually arrested, and the soldier takes the ass and loads him with his baggage, his lance prominently on top to terrify the passers-by. Coming to a small town, the soldier stays not in an inn but in the house of a town councillor (*decurio*, x, 1)—the right *not* to be forced to accept official travellers was an exceptional privilege.[29] When he sets off for Rome, the soldier sells the ass, which he has acquired for nothing, and pockets the proceeds. As is generally recognized now, nothing could be further from the truth than Rostovtzeff's idea that the army of the Imperial period somehow represented an oppressed peasantry.[30] On the contrary, the soldiers were a privileged official class whose presence was feared by ordinary people.

This soldier is represented as being loosely attached to the entourage of the governor as he travels through the province, presumably on his judicial circuit.[31] But no governor appears in person in the story until the final stage at Corinth, the capital (*caput*) of Achaea.[32] In the famous scene in *Acts* set in Corinth we see the proconsul Gallio on his tribunal when Paul is dragged before him and accused. In Apuleius the proconsul is in his house, when one of the victims of a poisoner, just before death, rushes to the house demanding his protection, and by loud shouts and raising a disturbance among the people, causes the doors to be opened and a hearing granted (x, 28). The proconsul hears the case and condemns the female poisoner to the beasts.

Several things are significant in this process. The governor in a provincial city functions under the pressure of crowds following every interesting turn of events. He too may be staying with a local notable, for there is no certain evidence that the Roman state normally owned official residences for governors.[33] Before her execution the woman is locked up in the public prison of Corinth (' de publico carcere ', v, 34)—for it was these city prisons which governors normally used. The governor is dependent on the city in another way too; for the wild beast show in which the woman is to die is one put on by a rich local magnate to celebrate his assumption of the chief office in the city. Apuleius' description perfectly catches the overtones of local office-holding; ' Thiasus, for that was the name of my owner, a citizen of Corinth, . . . had held the lower offices in succession, as his descent and dignity demanded, and had now been appointed to the quinquennial magistracy; and as, in order to live up to the glory of assuming the *fasces*, he had promised a gladiatorial show to last three days, he was in the process of making provision for his munificence (*munificentia*).' [34] One of the most curious features of the judicial system of the Empire was that local office-holders, putting on shows at their own expense, could *buy* condemned prisoners from the

[28] See now S. Mitchell, ' Requisitioned Transport in the Roman Empire: a New Inscription from Pisidia ', *JRS* LXVI (1976), 106.

[29] For release from the obligation of *hospitium* (ἀνεπισταθμεία) see e.g. Sherk, *Roman Documents*, no. 57; *FIRA*² I, no. 56; 73; *Dig.* L, 4, 18, 30; XXVII, 1, 6, 8; F. Millar, *Emperor in the Roman World* (1977), 460–1 (athletes); T. Drew-Bear, W. Eck, P. Herrmann, ' Sacrae Litterae ', *Chiron* VII (1977), 355 (senators).

[30] See Rostovtzeff, op. cit. (n. 24), ch. 11.

[31] For the proconsul's assize tour see G. P. Burton, ' Proconsuls, Assizes and the Administration of Justice under the Empire ', *JRS* LXV (1975), 92. It is attested that Beroea in Macedonia was an assize-centre, and the system probably existed in all proconsular provinces (p. 97). Note that the appointment of *tutores* for the children of a man thought to be dead is alluded to in *Met.* I, 6: ' liberis tuis tutores iuridici provincialis decreto dati '. No deductions should be drawn from the use of this term, which simply means the proconsul, as does δικαστής in *Lucius or the Ass*, 55.

[32] *Met.* X, 18: ' quod caput est totius Achaiae provinciae '.

[33] The evidence on this puzzling question is very well collected and discussed by R. Egger, *Das Praetorium als Amtssitz und Quartier römischer Spitzenfunktionäre* (1966), without revealing what sort of ' residence ', owned by whom, was used by proconsuls in the ' capitals ' of their provinces.

[34] *Met.* X, 18. For Corinth see n. 11 above. The office of *duovir quinquennalis* in the *colonia* is well attested on inscriptions, see e.g. *Corinth* VIII. 2: *Latin Inscriptions*, p. 157. The assumption that Lucius' first language will have been Greek is fully reflected in the rapidly changing balance of Latin and Greek inscriptions in the second century see *Corinth* VIII. 3: *The Inscriptions, 1926–1950*, pp. 18–19. [Dio], *Or.* XXXVII, 26 (perhaps by Favorinus) records the Hellenization of the city.

state and have them eaten by wild beasts for the delectation of large crowds. It was regarded as a remarkable act of benevolence by Marcus Aurelius and Commodus that in 177 they reduced the price which the provincial office-holders had to pay.[35]

We cannot understand the government, such as it was, of the peaceful provinces of the Empire if we do not think of the close personal relations which the governor was bound to have with the provincial upper classes, and above all with those of the city in which he spent most of his time. Exactly for this reason, when the well-born young Lucius from Corinth arrives in Hypata, he is questioned by his host ' about our native city and its leading citizens (*primores*) and finally about the governor himself ' (I, 26). But in most places the governor was not present (obviously enough); and nor—which is perhaps not so obvious—were any forces, officials or representatives sent by him. The cities ran themselves. Or rather—and this is one of the most vivid impressions left by the novel—they were run by a network of local aristocratic families, whose doings, public and private, were the subject of intense observer participation—approbation, curiosity, indignation, incipient violence—on the part of the lower classes of the towns. The leading families in Apuleius form a social class immediately distinguishable on sight from the rest of the people. Lucius sees a woman arriving in the market place of Hypata escorted by slaves; her rich dress ' proclaimed her a lady (*matrona*) ' (II, 2); and the ass at once recognizes the gentle birth (*matronatus*) of a young girl captured by the robbers (IV, 23). The upper classes have substantial houses in the cities, with households of slaves with carefully differentiated functions (IX, 2; X, 13). They may own landed properties at a distance (X, 4), in one case run by a slave overseer with a staff of slave shepherds (VII, 15; VIII, 15), and in another by a slave overseer (*vilicus*) who keeps his accounts (*rationes*) in his house (VIII, 22); alternatively we find a free tenant bringing a leg of venison as a gift to his landlord (VIII, 31).

The novel, like the pages of Plutarch's *Moralia*, written rather more than half a century earlier,[36] shows how a network of relationships connected the local aristocrats of different Greek cities. Lucius, from Corinth, is portrayed as a relative of Plutarch, from Chaeronea; and the grand lady whom he meets in the market place of Hypata is a relative of his mother (II, 2–3). He brings with him to Hypata a letter of recommendation from Demeas in Corinth, vouching specifically for his good birth (I, 22–3). On another visit to the market place he meets a friend with whom he has studied in Athens, and who is now aedile, or market supervisor, in his home town (I, 24).

As Apuleius' description of the magnate from Corinth implies, power and influence in these small provincial towns had become largely hereditary. Hence a group of young men (*iuvenes*) of the best birth were free to terrorize the streets of Hypata by night.[37] Or a poor man could be driven off his lands by ' a rich and powerful young neighbour who misused the prestige of his ancestry, was powerful in local politics and could easily do anything in the town ' (IX, 35). On the other side rich people could actively avoid local office and responsibility. When a group of robbers reaches Thebes, they ask who are the richest men there, and are told of a wealthy money-changer (*nummularius*) who dresses poorly and uses every means to conceal his wealth ' for fear of office and public obligations (*munera publica*) ' (IV, 9). That touches of course on one of the most familiar themes from the city life of Antiquity: the extraction of value from the rich not by taxation but by laying on them the obligation to assume expensive functions directly and in person.[38] Here we see the necessary

[35] For the well-known *senatus consultum* of 177 see J. H. Oliver and R. E. A. Palmer, *Hesperia* XXIV (1955), 320. For this interpretation see F. Millar, op. cit. (n. 29), 195.

[36] See C. P. Jones, op. cit. (n. 14), ch. 5, ' Plutarch's Society: *Domi nobiles* '.

[37] II, 18: ' vesana factio nobilissimorum iuvenum pacem publicam infestat '. Cf. *Dig.* XLVIII, 19, 28, 3 (Callistratus) on the difficulty for the governor in repressing the disorderly conduct ' in quibusdam civitatibus ' of those ' qui volgo se iuvenes appellant '.

[38] The best analysis of this situation, as it existed in the Classical and early Hellenistic Greek city, is provided by P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque* (1976), ch. 2. The remark of Rostovtzeff, op. cit. (n. 26), ch. 8, n. 41, that there is no adequate treatment of the history of liturgies under the Empire, remains valid. For a useful recent collection of legal evidence see W. Langhammer, *Die rechtliche und soziale Stellung der ' Magistratus Municipales ' und der ' Decuriones '* (1973), 237 f. But see now L. Neesen, ' Die Entwicklung der Leistungen und Ämter (munera et honores) im römischen Kaiserreich des zweiten bis vierten Jahrhundert ', *Historia* XXX (1981), 203.

social framework for that process: the man does his best—but everybody in the town knows that his well-guarded house is filled with riches.[39]

The people of the towns might of course follow the doings of the rich with favour and approbation. The young lady captured by the robbers had been engaged to an aristocratic young man ' whom the whole city had adopted as its public son ', and the engagement had been celebrated by a procession of the family and relatives to make sacrifices at the temples and public buildings.[40] When he heroically rescues her and returns home, ' the whole city poured out to see the longed for sight ' (VII, 13; cf. VIII, 2). But favour for one person could quickly turn, in the context of a public ceremonial, into a demonstration against another. So, after the death of a leading citizen in Larissa ' by ancestral ritual, as he was one of the *optimates*, the public funeral procession was conducted through the forum '. But the dead man's father shouts out that he had been murdered by his wife, and the crowd begins to call for fire and stones (II, 27), just as in another scene the crowd determines to stone a witch to death (I, 10). Again, in a town in Thessaly, an old man goes from the funeral of his younger son to the forum, and accuses the elder son of the murder; a regular trial then follows. ' By his lamentations he inflamed with such pity and indignation the town council and also the people, that they all shouted that the delays of justice . . . should be set aside and that he should be stoned to death, to provide a communal punishment for a communal wrong.' But the magistrates fear that violence will get out of hand, and persuade the council and people that a proper trial should be held. It is conducted in the council-chamber (*curia*) with the councillors as jury, and if the charge had been proved the town executioner (*carnifex*) would have carried out the sentence. But it turns out that it was his stepmother who had tried to kill the boy, and had only succeeded in giving him an overdose—from which (needless to say) he is just waking up. So the stepmother is sent into lifelong exile, and her slave accomplice executed.[41]

These are just the sort of differential penalties for condemned persons of different social status which are well attested in the Roman Empire.[42] But there is a puzzle here, for on the established view only the governor of a province could carry out capital sentences or impose penalties such as exile;[43] and of course a moment ago we saw the proconsul of Achaea doing just that in Corinth. The same problem arises with the famous scene of the mock trial of Lucius in Hypata (III, 2–9). Here, Lucius, before his transformation, comes back late one night from a party, slays (as he thinks) three robbers, is tried next day by the city council and thinks himself near to a death sentence—when it is revealed that the three victims were really inflated bladders blowing about in the wind. Once again the trial, or mock-trial, takes place in the context of intense crowd participation, so much so that the people successfully demand that it should be transferred from the forum to the theatre—which was of course a normal meeting-place in Greek cities.[44]

So Apuleius' novel presents one story in which trial and sentence is carried out by a city council and another in which the whole dramatic point would surely have been lost, if the original readers would have known all along that Lucius' trial could not possibly have been

[39] *Met.* IV, 9: ' parva se⟨d⟩ satis munita domuscula contentus, pannosus alioquin ac sordidus, aureos folles incubabat '. In a very general way the term ' aureos folles ', reflecting the custom of storing money in bags, foreshadows the usage which becomes official in the early fourth century, when *follis* becomes a term for a unit of currency. See A. H. M. Jones, ' The Origin and Early History of the *Follis* ', *The Roman Economy* (1974), 330; M. H. Crawford, *ANRW* II. 2 (1975), 586.

[40] *Met.* IV, 26. As regards the remarkable expression ' filius publicus ', I owe to Miss H. C. van Bremen the perception that the inscriptions of the Greek cities often emphasize the private virtues of members of the leading families as expressed in their public life.

[41] *Met.* X, 6–12. For the sentences, X, 12: ' et novercae quidem perpetuum indicitur exilium, servus vero patibulo suffigitur '. *Patibulum* seems to be used here as a synonym for *crux*, cf. Th. Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht* (1899), 920–1 (not discussing this passage), and *RE* s.v. ' Patibulum '.

[42] See P. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (1970), pt. II.

[43] For a statement of the principle see e.g. A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (1963), 35 f.; 75 f. For a survey of the evidence which may cast some doubt on the general assumption that local courts did not and could not carry out capital sentences see E. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People* II, ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Black, (1979), 219, n. 80, and D. Nörr, *Imperium und Polis* (1966), 30 f.; note *Syll.*[3] 799 (Cyzicus, A.D. 38), showing that the city authorities there could impose a sentence of exile from the city.

[44] For meetings in the theatre see J. Colin, ' Apulée en Thessalie; fiction ou vérité? ', *Latomus* XXIV (1965), 330, on p. 342, n. 3; cf. idem, *Les villes libres de l'Orient gréco-romain et l'envoi au supplice par acclamations populaires* (1965), ch. 3 (assuming that the procedure depends on the freedom of the cities of Thessaly).

real—that is if they would have assumed that only the governor could carry out capital sentence. There seem to me to be three possibilities. We can accept that not only the particular course of events but the entire context will have seemed pure fantasy to second-century readers. Or, we can assume that both Apuleius and they knew that the cities of Thessaly were free cities, in which the writ of the proconsul did not run and which had their own capital jurisdiction. But, the trouble is, were they free cities ? I can find no clear proof that they were.[45] For that matter it is not possible to state exactly what ' freedom ' for Greek cities under the Empire meant, or whether it always meant the same thing.[46] In other words, if we switch back to the real world, we find it just as confusing and ambiguous as fiction. Nothing is more illusory than the idea that the real world of the Roman Empire presents us with a clearly defined and intelligible system of public law and administration.

That being so, I should like to try a quite different hypothesis, namely that what the novel represents is Apuleius' assumptions as to how local justice worked in the cities, irrespective of their formal status, when the governor was not there. In the real world too, we must remember, he usually was not; the more privileged communities were visited by the governor of a province once a year; many never saw him at all. We can of course find some cases where a prisoner is duly locked up by city officials to await trial by the governor when he comes.[47] But I do suggest that, especially when popular indignation was aroused, it is impossible to imagine that such self-restraint normally operated.

Whatever may have happened in reality, in the world of the novel justice is done and public order maintained, if at all, by self-help. When Lucius disappears, having been turned into an ass, it is reported to the robbers that he is thought guilty of the robbery; his slave has been examined by the magistrates of Hypata under torture, and a group of men has been sent to Corinth to seek him out for punishment (VII, 2). When the robbers are finally located, a party sets out from Hypata, catches them and simply executes them (VII, 13). A little later some shepherds arrest a man on suspicion of murder and keep him bound overnight in a hut, intending to take him next day to the magistrates for punishment (VII, 26). Similarly, an armed group of local men on horseback arrests the Syrian priests for robbery and takes them back to a prison, apparently located in a mere village (IX, 9–10, cf. IX, 4). Even the passing soldiers who arrest the gardener bring him to the local magistrates; he is put in the public prison to await a capital penalty (IX, 42).

The world we are looking at is one wholly without policing by any Imperial forces, except in one very extreme case. Justice is highly localized. A man who realises that he will be suspected of murder simply abandons his family, moves to Aetolia and contracts a new marriage (I, 19). When a group of slaves on an outlying estate hears of the death of their mistress and fears a change of owner, they load all their belongings on pack-animals, go on what seems to be a journey of about three days, and settle in a city where they can live without discovery and support themselves (VIII, 15–23). The cities are not represented as exercising any check on arrivals; when Lucius reaches Hypata he has to go into an inn to ask which town it is (I, 21). Nor do the towns themselves have any significant police forces. The nearest to that which we meet are the attendants of the m: ket supervisor in Hypata (I, 24–5), and the attendants of the magistrates there who burst into the house where Lucius is, arrest him and take him to his mock trial; the prosecution is conducted by the prefect of the night watch,[48] who duly claims to have observed the murder while on street patrol. But Lucius had carried his sword to protect himself, and in the several scenes elsewhere in

[45] Julius Caesar certainly granted freedom to the Thessalians, Plut., *Caesar* 48; Appian, *BC* II, 368. Thereafter the situation is obscure, and neither the existence of Thessalian coins, nor Thessalian votes in the Amphictyonic league (Pausanias X, 8, 3) nor the adoption of new eras in A.D. 10–11 and again in A.D. 41 necessarily imply grants of freedom—so R. Bernhardt, *Imperium und Eleutheria* (1971), 202, 208. *ILS* 1067, showing P. Pactumeius Clemens, *cos. suff.* 138, as ' legato divi Hadriani Athenis, Thespiis, Plaetaeis, item in Thessalia ', *might* imply the freedom of Thessaly; but the freedom of Plataea is *deduced*, e.g. by Larsen, *ESAR* IV, 447, from its presence on this inscription.

[46] cf. the complex variations discussed by R. Bernhardt, ' Die Immunitas der Freistädte ', *Historia* XXIX (1980), 190 (on freedom from tribute).

[47] This pattern is clear in the case of the martyrs of Lyon, Eusebius, *HE* V, 1, and especially in the martyrdom of Pionius at Smyrna, Knopf-Krüger-Ruhbach, *Ausgewählte Märtyrakten*, no. 10; Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, no. 10.

[48] *Met.* III, 2–3: ' nocturnae custodiae praefectus '. The term must translate νυκτοστράτηγος, attested on a number of inscriptions from Greek cities, see esp. Jones, *The Greek City*, 212.

the novel which represent robbers mounting assaults on the town houses of the rich, no organized police force appears. If the attacks are beaten off, as they twice are,[49] it is by self-help from within the house, or from neighbours.

Like the potentially violent crowds which demanded justice in the cities, and the arrests of criminals by armed groups, this self-help is an important aspect of the society represented in the novel. But it is by no means the only area in which the novel presents alternative models of ancient society to those which we normally accept. For instance, one influential modern view represents the typical small town in the Roman provinces as not primarily an economic entity, but rather ' a social phenomenon, the result of the predilection of the wealthier classes for the amenities of urban life '.[50] That very important cultural factor is indeed perfectly illustrated in Apuleius: Lucius' rich female relative in Hypata asks him, ' How are you enjoying our native city? To my knowledge we far excel all other cities in temples, baths and other public works. . . . At any rate there is freedom for anyone at leisure, and for the stranger coming on business a crowd of people like that at Rome ' (II, 19). It is beginning to be recognized, however, that the latter part of that claim is also important. The economic functions of towns in a pre-industrial society can be complex and important in aggregate, even if the units of production and exchange are themselves small.[51] It is therefore all the more worth emphasizing that the towns in Apuleius function, not indeed as centres of production, but as the focus for organized exchanges of goods and the hiring of labour. All of this is conducted for cash; whatever else this may be, it is certainly a fully monetized economy. Admittedly, when the rich accumulate a surplus, they literally just accumulate it in cash. Lucius' miserly host at Hypata does lend out money against deposits in gold and silver (I, 21); but the bulk of his money simply rests in a heavily locked store-room (*horreum*) in his house. Everyone in the town knows it is there, and the robbers duly break down the door with axes and take away the money in bags (I, 21; III, 28). But, otherwise, the cities are the scenes of active exchanges for cash: in the market place of Hypata fish is available for sale, and hay for horses can be bought for cash (I, 24). A man who is by profession a vendor of cheese and related products, travelling throughout Thessaly, Aetolia and Boeotia, comes to Hypata, perhaps for the day of a special cheese-market, only to find that a large operator (*negotiator magnarius*) has bought up the entire supply (I, 5). The poorest free person whom we meet in Apuleius is the market-gardener who works a small patch of land without even a house; none the less he too drives the ass to the town each morning to sell his produce to the retailers (IX, 32). The market places are also the scene of regular auctions; the runaway slaves can immediately have their animals auctioned for cash (VIII, 23–5), and a traveller short of money can find an auctioneer advertizing for someone to be paid in cash for watching a corpse at night (II, 21–3). If all else failed, one could earn a poor income in cash by portering (*saccaria*, I, 7), or just beg for coins at the crossroads (I, 6). No doubt the inns, where you also paid in cash (I, 17), did not receive quite as many people as those of Rome. But what is clear is that the towns are represented as providing real concentrations of activity both by way of exchange and in the hire of labour. Crowd reactions, to good or bad news, or the handling of wrong-doers, surely also imply chronic under-employment, and hence the availability of labour for hire. Given the constant exchanges of cash it is not surprising that the towns have professional money-changers (*nummularii*); when a slave pays a doctor a large sum for a drug, the coins are sealed in a bag, to be checked next day by a money-changer (X, 9).

What is more striking in Apuleius is the level and nature of economic activity outside the towns, first in villages (called *pagus*, *castellum* or *vicus*), and secondly in the countryside itself. Before I give some examples I should remind you of how the economic life of the peasantry was described in a very interesting recent article: ' The economy of the Roman empire, in spite of its sophistication in some respects, was predominantly a subsistence economy. . . . The bulk of the labour force in the Roman empire, perhaps 80–90 per cent,

[49] *Met.* IV, 9–11; 19–21. The realistic and unheroic character of the robbers' tales of defeat is well brought out by P. A. McKay, ' *Klephtika*: the Tradition of the Tales of Banditry in Apuleius ', *Greece and Rome* X (1963), 147.

[50] A. H. M. Jones, ' The Cities of the Roman Empire ', in *The Roman Economy* (1974), 1, on p. 31.

[51] See the valuable article by K. Hopkins, ' Economic Growth and Towns in Classical Antiquity ', in P. Abrams and E. A. Wrigley (eds.), *Towns in Societies* (1978), 35; the rest of that volume also presents much relevant material and argument.

were primarily peasants who produced most of what they themselves consumed and consumed most of what they produced.' [52] The same passage admits, however, that the countryside was affected by the monetary economy, and all I can say in this context is that it is this aspect of rural economic life which the novel puts before us. In the story a village too may have an auctioneer; one of these sells off the ass to a baker from the next village, who is also buying a quantity of corn for cash (IX, 10). The baker's neighbour is a fuller (IX, 22), and both households conduct their trade in their immediate living quarters, the one with wooden troughs in which flour is sifted (IX, 23), the other with wickerwork frames on which cloth is placed for whitening with sulphur (IX, 24). In the same village where the ass is sold there is a *faber*, apparently a free man, who works under an *officinator* or owner of a workshop. He works for cash, to buy food; his wife works at wool-making (*lanificium*), also for cash, with which they buy oil for lighting (IX, 5). When pressed for cash they sell a large jar which is standing in their house (IX, 7).

That a household could be a multiple economic unit is also clear elsewhere. The rich young lady with whom the ass is rescued gives him into the care of her slave chief herdsman (*armentarius equiso*) who takes him out to a country property. There the ass is used by the man's wife to turn a mill which grinds corn for the neighbours, and earns a cash revenue; the barley meant for the ass's upkeep is also ground in the mill and sold to neighbouring tenants (VII, 15). Released from the mill, the ass is given over to a slave-boy whose job is to gather wood in the hills; but once again it turns out that he sells the wood for cash, for use in a next-door household (VII, 17–20). I will come back later to this process of gathering from the wild. It is enough to emphasize now that the world portrayed by Apuleius involves cash exchanges for produce right down to the lowest levels. We even find that the slave shepherds in flight ask a goatherd grazing his flock beside the track whether he has milk or cheese for sale (VIII, 19). The only trace of a subsistence economy in Apuleius is a seasonal one; over the winter the market-gardener, having nothing left to sell, lives on overgrown vegetables from his plot which have run to seed (IX, 32). In other words all the food-producing operations are specialized, and the products are exchanged for cash. Villages and countryside have small, domestic-scale establishments for processing food or clothes. When we have read Apuleius we might carry away the image not of a subsistence economy, but of something more like Alan McFarlane's deliberately provocative description of thirteenth-century England: ' a capitalist-market economy without factories '.[53]

Direct production for household consumption does appear, but seems to be more characteristic of the *richer* households, which can achieve the necessary variety of production. It is in that context, and only there, that transfers of produce occur which are not for cash, i.e. are gifts. So a wealthy neighbour of the market-gardener promises him a gift ' from his estates ' of corn, olive-oil and two jars of wine (IX, 33). The same background is implied when Lucius' rich female relative in Hypata sends him as gifts (*xeniola*) a pig, five chickens and a jar of wine, for use at dinner (II, 11).

In a different context, the tenant (*colonus*) of a rich landlord brings him as a gift (*munus*), a leg of venison—the product, as is explicitly stated, of a hunting expedition (VIII, 31). With that we come to another side of the ancient economy, and one which is almost wholly neglected. The oft-repeated modern doctrine that agriculture was the fundamental economic activity of the ancient world is of course obviously true, but none the less gives a wholly inadequate impression of people's relations to the earth and its products. In the world of Apuleius at least, the people of the countryside are not only agriculturalists; they are also pastoralists whose flocks live in wild country, and for that matter they are hunters and gatherers. To be strict, gathering appears only in the story of the slave boy collecting wood in the hills; but any description of the economy of the ancient world which ignored the gathering of food and other products from the wild would be hopelessly inadequate.[54] Hunting however is a fundamental feature of the world in which Apuleius' characters live. Human habitation exists against the backdrop of a landscape in which there

[52] K. Hopkins. ' Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 B.C.–A.D. 400) ', *JRS* LXX (1980), 101 on p. 104.

[53] A. MacFarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (1978), 196.

[54] I know of no serious reflection on this fact except J. M. Frayn, ' Wild and Cultivated Plants: A Note on the Peasant Economy of Roman Italy ', *JRS* LXV (1975), 32 = *Subsistence Farming in Roman Italy* (1979), ch. 4.

are bears (IV, 13; VII, 24), wolves (VII, 22; VIII, 15), boar (VIII, 4), deer (VIII, 31) and wild goats (VIII, 4), not to speak of the unspecified ' wild beasts ' which the rich man from Corinth has come to collect in Thessaly for his show (X, 18). In consequence the group of shepherds in flight are armed with throwing-spears, heavy hunting-spears, arrows and clubs (VIII, 16). When force has to be applied against neighbours, a rich household in the country can deploy swords and spears, and call out large and ferocious sheepdogs (IX, 36–8). Then again, when the Syrian priests are staying in the house of the leading citizen (*vir primarius*) of a town, the ass is thought to have rabies. The slaves of the household instantly seize spears and axes, until the ass demonstrates by drinking water that he does not have rabies. This town house is also equipped with a stable of horses and a pack of hunting-dogs (IX, 2).

Nearly all the features which I have tried to isolate in the world of the *Golden Ass* come together in the marvellous mock-heroic story told in the robbers' hideout, and added to the main narrative framework by Apuleius (IV, 13–22). One group of robbers had gone south into Boeotia; at Plataea they found busy talk of the show which was to be put on by a local notable, Democharès: ' for he was a man of distinguished birth, great wealth and eminent liberality, and was preparing public entertainments (*voluptates*) with a splendour worthy of his fortune '. He had assembled gladiators, *venatores*, to fight against wild beasts, and condemned criminals (*noxii*) to be eaten by the beasts. The beasts were bears, acquired in three ways: by his own hunting expeditions, by purchase and by gift from his friends. Unfortunately, in spite of heavy expenditure on upkeep, many of the bears died; their corpses were thrown out on the streets and were seized and eaten by the starving poor.

The robbers therefore skinned one of these deceased bears and put one of their leaders inside it. They took the supposed bear to Democharès and produced a forged letter saying that it was a gift from a friend of his in Thrace who had caught it while hunting. With that they went off, richly rewarded with coins from the store kept in the house—and, in a touch which is typical of the narrative, the people of the town rushed to see the bear and commented (' consonaque civium voce ') on Democharès' good luck.

At night the robbers came back, and the one disguised as a bear got up from the courtyard, killed the slave janitor, opened the door with his key and let them in. In the house he showed them the store-room (*horreum*) filled with silver, which they carried off in coffins taken from a tomb outside the town. But before they could come back for a second load, the household woke up, and the supposed bear was confronted with slaves armed with clubs, spears and swords, supported by fierce hunting-dogs. The story ends with a fine mock-heroic narration of his death—reminding us, if we needed it, that what we are reading is just fiction.

None the less the novel does offer us a complex and significant portrait of a provincial society: the network of relationships among the provincial aristocracy; the political functions, displays and generosities of the rich, as acted out in front of their local communities; the crude accumulation of wealth side by side with extreme poverty; an economy which was both monetized on the one hand and gave a large place to hunting in the wild on the other; a world where brigandage was rife, but where society could close ranks to exert force where it was needed, and was fully armed to do so. The forces of the governor were few and far away—to come back to a question which I raised earlier, I suggest that we should not believe for a moment that in the real world the execution of justice on local murderers or robbers was dutifully left to the governor's discretion. The Emperor's distant existence was felt by all. But only very special circumstances would bring his forces into action. We should not be surprised, after reading Apuleius, to find that just about this time Thespiae in Boeotia sent a contingent to fight on campaign with Marcus Aurelius,[55] or that when a marauding group of barbarians from the Black Sea reached Boeotia they were attacked and slaughtered by a local force.[56] We might recall that Apuleius says that the armed group of shepherds in flight needed only a trumpet to resemble a real army (VIII, 16).[57]

Of course we must not forget that all this is not only fiction, but is a Greek short story transformed and expanded in Latin by a rich and well-born writer from Africa. When he

[55] A. Plassart, ' Une levée de volontaires Thespiens sous Marc Aurèle ', *Mélanges Glotz* II (1932), 731.

[56] Pausanias X, 34, 5.

[57] For comparative evidence note P. A. Brunt, ' Did Imperial Rome disarm her subjects ? ', *Phoenix* XXIX (1975), 260.

went to Athens, it was not to study the lives of the poor in the Greek countryside, but to earn the title which his fellow-citizens in Madaurus were to give him, 'the Platonic philosopher'.[58] In writing his novel, with its exuberant descriptive detail and powerful erotic elements, he was not, in intention, reporting anything, but inventing a world in which to set the adventures of Lucius. But the invented world of fiction may yet represent—perhaps cannot help representing—important features of the real world.[59] For the historian, the *Golden Ass* depicts levels of social and economic life which the vast mass of surviving Classical literature simply ignores; it adds depth and perspective to patterns which we know from other evidence, for instance in portraying the roles played by the local aristocracies, as seen from below. But above all it offers us alternative models—of the operations of justice or the nature of economic life outside the towns—to those which we generally accept. The images gained from the novel can be used, in other words, to apply new questions and new hypotheses to the bewildering mass of data which survives from the real world of the Roman Empire.

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[58] *Ins. lat d'Alg.* 2115 (Madauros), cf. *PIR*² A 958.

[59] For comparable attempts to use ancient fiction, see e.g. P. Veyne, 'Vie de Trimalcion', *Annales* XVI (1961), 213; A. M. Scarcella, 'Les structures socio-économiques du roman de Xénophon d'Éphèse', *REG* XC (1977), 249. Both the title and the approach adopted in this paper were suggested by Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince* (1964), using Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji*.